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Greerlynn Myrtice Bezue-Tull
University of Southern Mississippi

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The University of Southern Mississippi

AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON THE MISSISSIPPI
ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT OF EXTENDED CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

by

Greerlynn Myrtice Bezue-Tull

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2013

ABSTRACT

AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON THE MISSISSIPPI ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT OF EXTENDED CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

by Greerlynn Myrtice Bezue-Tull

December 2013

For more than a decade, federal legislation has been characterized by increasing standards of accountability for learning for all students. With the passage of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004, schools are now accountable for special education students, even students with severe cognitive disabilities, in every aspect of education, including increased student achievement through access to the general education curriculum. Moreover, IDEIA (2004) mandated that students with severe cognitive disabilities participate in high-stakes accountability testing through individual state-developed alternate assessment measures.

This study investigated whether Mississippi's special education teachers perceived the Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Educational Curriculum Framework (MAAECF) as providing an accurate assessment of performance for students with severe cognitive disabilities. The study also examined the extent and ways that the MAAECF is used in curricular and instructional decisions for students identified as having severe cognitive disabilities in Mississippi schools. Finally, this study investigated teacher perspective of the MAAECF and the extent to which training, support, feedback, and student interaction might have impacted the accuracy, usefulness, and quality of the MAAECF.

A quantitative research design was used for this study. A researcher-developed survey, the Alternate Assessment Rating Scale (AARS), was provided to participants in the six southern counties of the Mississippi gulf coast. The results from the AARS provided quantitative data that were analyzed using appropriate statistical tests to provide insight into the researcher's questions.

This study revealed that Mississippi special education teachers perceive the following of the MAAECF: not providing an accurate assessment of performance for their students with severe cognitive disabilities; that they infrequently use the data from the MAAECF in making curricular and instructional decisions; the quality of training programs is believed it to be of good quality; that in regard to accuracy in measuring student performance, the student interaction component made the greater difference; that regards to usefulness of the results of the MAAECF, the support component of the MAAECF made the most difference; that with regard to the quality of administering the MAAECF, feedback and support made the most difference and that overall, Mississippi special education teachers from various counties on the gulf coast perceived the use of the MAAECF as being beneficial despite not accurately depicting their student's abilities.

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A Dissertation
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Approved:

Thelma J. Roberson

Director

David E. Lee

Kyna J. Shelley

Michael E. Ward

Susan A. Siltanen

Dean of the Graduate School

December 2013

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Greer W. P. Stevenson, Ph.D., a loving, caring, hardworking man who instilled in me the love of reading and the concept that education can take you anywhere. Thank you for loving me, always being there for me, but most of all, for being my dad. I miss and love you.

I finally got it done daddy.....

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade, federal legislation has been characterized by increasing standards of accountability for learning for all students, including students identified as having severe cognitive disabilities. In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which outlines expectations for states and the local education agency (LEA) to ensure that school districts perform adequately each year based on student achievement scores on high-stakes accountability testing. This legislation emphasizes that all children, including those with severe cognitive disabilities, be included in accountability measures (NCLB, 2001). In addition to passage of the NCLB, the reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 stated that accountability for student achievement applies to all subgroups, including students who are eligible for special education services. Furthermore, IDEIA mandated the use of alternate assessments to measure academic performance for these children. In addition to the use of an alternate assessment, IDEIA, like the NCLB Act, includes a provision for a highly qualified staff. In order to ensure that school personnel have the skills and knowledge necessary to improve the academic achievement and functional performance of children with disabilities, IDEIA (2004) mandated high-quality, intensive preservice preparation and professional development for all personnel who work with children with disabilities. This professional development is to focus on preparing teachers to use scientifically based instructional practices to the maximum extent possible when instructing students (IDEIA, 2004).

In response to the reauthorized IDEIA (2004), states have developed alternative assessments to measure the performance of students with severe cognitive disabilities. In Mississippi, this assessment is known as the Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Frameworks [MAAECF], (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). It is designed to measure student progress and performance toward state standards, assess individual student strengths/weaknesses, and document academic achievement. The MAAECF is currently administered to students with severe cognitive disabilities in Grades three through eight and Grade 12. A focused study of the issues related to alternate assessments was needed to determine the effectiveness and efficiency for the use of these measurements in regard to students with cognitive disabilities.

Rationale for Study

Alternate assessments are proposed to aid accountability and curricular access for students with severe cognitive disabilities (Roach, Elliott, & Berndt, 2007). Although increased accountability is desirable, the question is whether an alternate assessment such as the MAAECF provides the needed data to adequately measure progress for students with disabilities and provides curricular access for these students. Furthermore, little data exist as to how and if teachers use results for making curricular and instructional decisions. Finally, implementation of alternate assessments is often complex and time intensive (Turner, Baldwin, Kleinert, & Kerns, 2000), leading to a debate as to whether the time and effort in administering the assessment is worth the cost of administration.

After more than 10 years of the enactment and implementation of the NCLB Act, the question remains as to whether the use of alternate assessments is accomplishing is proposed by the laws. Educational research is limited or void as to the effectiveness and

efficiency of the use of alternate assessments in making an impact on learning outcomes for students. Moreover, there is a lack of evidence to substantiate whether the NCLB Act of 2001 and IDEIA (2004) has accomplished the purpose of increased participation in the general education curriculum for students in special education classrooms. This gap in the literature suggests the need for research related to the mandate for the use of alternate assessment as a framework for measuring progress of students with significant cognitive disabilities.

This study examined the extent to which educators perceived that the MAAECF provided an accurate assessment of academic performance for students with severe cognitive disabilities. This study contributed information to narrow the gap in research as to whether the law has had an impact on guiding curriculum and instruction for this subgroup of students. Finally, teachers' satisfaction of the quality of professional development training for the administration of the MAAECF provided insight into the process for preparation for administration of the alternate assessment system.

Background of the Study

Prior to the authorization of Public Law 94142 in 1975, Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), education law did not provide for a free and appropriate public education for children and youth with disabilities (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). However, in 1975, the passage of the EAHCA, Sec. 3(b)(3)), stated that all qualified persons with disabilities within the authority of a school district are entitled to a free appropriate public education (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). An appropriate education may include education in regular classes with the use of related aids and services, if need be, or special education and related services in separate

classrooms for all or portions of the school day. The program must be designed to meet individual needs to the same extent that the needs of nondisabled students are met (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Students with disabilities must participate with nondisabled students in both academic and nonacademic services, including meals, recess, and physical education, to the maximum extent appropriate considering their individual needs (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 1997). The reauthorizations of what was originally known as Public Law 94-142 included passage of the IDEA of 1997. IDEA (1997) mandated that students with disabilities be included in accountability assessment programs with accommodations, if necessary, and that states and the LEA provide alternate assessments for those students deemed unable to participate in content standards assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

At the turn of the century, the Clinton administration established legislation known as Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994). This outcomes-based education reform legislation required schools to ensure all students reach full potential as evidenced by data collected to measure, compare, sort, analyze, and categorize student performance. Goals 2000: Educate America Act mandated public school districts correct deficits identified through the analysis of these data. This legislation was followed by the passage of the NCLB Act of 2001, which stipulated that states and the LEA develop procedures to ensure school districts perform adequately each year based on student achievement scores on high-stakes accountability testing. Furthermore, this legislation emphasized all children, including those with severe cognitive disabilities, be included in accountability measures (NCLB, 2001).

The reauthorization of the IDEIA (2004) mirrored the NCLB Act with regards to accountability for student achievement in all subgroups, including students who are eligible for special education services. Furthermore, IDEIA included a requirement for high-quality, intensive preservice professional development for all personnel who work with children with disabilities in order to ensure that such personnel have the skills and knowledge necessary to improve the academic achievement and functional performance of these children. In addition, IDEIA (2004) mandated the use of scientifically based instructional practices, to the maximum extent possible, in the instruction of children with disabilities.

In response to IDEIA (2004), states have developed alternative assessments to measure the performance of students with severe cognitive disabilities. In Mississippi, the alternate assessment for students with severe cognitive disabilities is known as the MAAECF. It was designed to document academic achievement by measuring student progress and performance toward state standards and assessing individual student strengths and weaknesses. The MAAECF is administered to students with severe cognitive disabilities in Grades three through eight and Grade 12.

Areas assessed on the MAAECF include mathematics, reading/language arts, and science. The Center for Alternate Assessment Review of Evidence and Scoring (CAARES) and Mississippi educators who designed the assessment were responsible for identifying “clusters” that must be addressed each year (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). Teachers and administrators are given the flexibility in choosing objectives based on the individual student’s strengths and needs while providing appropriate and meaningful instruction (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007).

To ensure growth and challenge in academics, the objectives must be varied and cannot be the same as used in prior years (NCLB, 2001). Direction is provided in gathering documents yearly to guarantee each competency is assessed. Although each grade level has similar elements for assessment, the test necessitated teachers to use their knowledge of each individual student's abilities and individual education plan (IEP) goals to make decisions on which cluster to administer (Mississippi Department of Education, 2008-2009).

Teachers of students with severe cognitive disabilities are trained in data collection, scoring, daily instruction for integrating age-appropriate activities, understanding the assessment, and improving reliability and validity when collecting documentation (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). To gauge the effectiveness of the training and the reliability of the use of the MAAECF, the Mississippi Department of Education requires teachers involved in the assessment of a student with severe cognitive disability be qualified. A qualified user of the MAAECF must take and pass a qualifying test after participating in a day-long training session that can be completed either face-to-face, via online, or teacher-as-trainer model (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). The Mississippi Department of Education (2007) also conducts "random monitoring of assessment, evidence, and rating results on representative samples of schools after the completion of the MAAECF each year" (p. 22).

Elliott, Thurlow, and Ysseldyke (1996) stated that teachers and those implementing assessments can provide valuable opinions on how assessments impact their classrooms and students. According to this research, teachers can provide the explanation to finding problems and offering improvements to the assessment practices

(Elliott et al., 1996). In the last 12 years, pursuant to the mandate of the NCLB Act, research has been conducted on the importance of assessments for students with disabilities, alignment of the assessment to the general curriculum, and meeting the needs of the students who take the assessment (Hager & Slocum, 2002; Mistretta, 2008; Towles-Reeves, 2007). It has only been in the last 7 years after the mandate of IDEA (1997) that research has been conducted with regard to how teachers perceived the state-developed alternate assessment for the basis of making change (Staugler, 2004).

In states that have inquired about teacher perceptions of alternate assessments, researchers have found teachers experience tremendous pressure due to the fear that assessments of students are designed to evaluate teacher performance rather than student performance (Thompson, Johnstone, Thurlow, & Altman, 2005). Another source of pressure identified was the extra hours outside of the classroom required to complete the alternate assessment (Langefeld, Thurlow, & Scott, 1997; Thompson et al., 2005). Research conducted by Clardy (2004) and Flowers, Ahlgrim-DeLzell, Browder, and Spooner (2005) on teacher's perceptions of alternate assessment also revealed similar negative aspects. Their research also revealed that teachers felt the assessment was more of a reflection of the teacher's work than the student and the assessments were demanding and time-consuming (Clardy, 2004; Flowers et al., 2005).

In addition to teacher attitudes of alternate assessment, another factor having an impact on this process is the quality of teacher training. Horvath, Kampfer-Bohach, and Kearns (2005) stated students of teachers, who have been well trained in instruction and assessment, will tend to achieve higher scores during assessment. Teachers who routinely integrate elements of the assessment into daily instruction (Kampfer, Horvath,

Kleinert, & Kearns, 2001) and have been trained in participation and accommodation decisions on large-scale assessments (DeStefano, Shriner, & Lloyd, 2001) tend to also have students who score higher on alternate assessments. Research also suggested that teachers who are trained in using assessment data to make instructional decisions produce better student scores on alternate assessments (Browder, Karvonen, Davis, Fallin, & Courtade-Little, 2005; Karvonen, Flowers, Browder, Wakeman, & Algozzine, 2006). In fact, the key to successful test administration is to provide teachers with excellent training, give them a well-defined scoring rubric, and ensure they are familiar with how the student best demonstrates what he or she is capable of doing (DeStefano et al., 2001).

Statement of the Problem

In response to the mandate of the NCLB Act of 2001 and IDEIA (2004), interest concerning the use of assessments to measure learning outcomes for all students based on targeted content standards. IDEIA (2004) stipulates the use of alternate assessments for students with disabilities and alignment of these assessments to the general curriculum. The question remains as to whether the alternate assessment is accomplishing the goal of higher standards and improved educational outcomes for students with severe cognitive disabilities. To meet the NCLB Act and IDEIA mandates, that all students participate in accountability measures, states have invested funds and time in the development of alternate assessments. However, educational research was limited as to the effectiveness and efficiency of the use of alternate assessments in making an impact on learning outcomes for students with severe cognitive disabilities. Lawmakers, policymakers, and state-level educational entities have failed to realize that simply mandating the process of

accountability through assessment will not ensure a positive outcome for students with disabilities.

Evidence supports the fact that teachers provide valuable information on the impact of assessment on instructional practices and student outcomes (Elliott et al., 1996). Moreover, in recent years, the research on teacher perception of the use of alternate assessments for students with severe cognitive disabilities has become integral to making changes in instructional practices for these students (Staugler, 2004). In fact, according to research by Elliott et al. (1996), teachers provide essential information to identification of problems and generating solutions to improvement of assessment practices. Providing teachers with quality training in administration of alternate assessments is essential to ensure that students demonstrate their best performances and that the assessment is implemented with fidelity to measure their performances (DeStefano et al., 2001).

Research Questions

This quantitative study addressed the perspectives and concerns of teachers administering the MAAECF in the various counties of the Mississippi gulf coast region. The sample included 123 special education teachers at 133 schools, which was the total number of special education teachers who administered the MAAECF during the 2011-2012 school year within this school district geographic area. The teachers provided answers to the survey through electronic mail. The special education teachers were selected by their participation in administering the MAAECF during the 2011-2012 school year to students with significant cognitive disabilities.

The following questions were addressed:

1. To what extent did special education teachers report that the MAAECF provided an accurate assessment of performance for students with severe cognitive disabilities?
2. To what extent and in what ways did special education teachers report that the results of the MAAECF were used in making curricular and instructional decisions for students identified as having severe cognitive disabilities in Mississippi schools?
3. What was the reported extent and quality of training programs for special education teachers who administered the MAAECF?
4. How did special education teachers report the influence of training (i.e., support, feedback, and student interaction) compared to the accuracy, usefulness, and quality of the MAAECF?

Significance of the Study

The disconnect between federal law requiring alternate assessment for students with severe cognitive disabilities and the actual practice of implementing these assessments was explored to provide lawmakers and educators with information as to the effectiveness of using the alternate assessment. For more than 38 years, federal legislation has been characterized by increasing standards of accountability for learning for all students, including students identified as having severe cognitive disabilities (IDEIA, 2004). To meet the mandate in the law for all students to participate in accountability measures, states have invested funds and time to development of alternate assessments. The research, however, was limited or void as to the effectiveness of these measures in making an impact on learning outcomes for students.

Results of this study provided reports from special education teachers regarding the use of the MAAECF. Specifically, teachers responded to the accuracy of the assessment, use of the results of the assessment, quality of training programs, and the significance of specific training components. The quality of training programs for administration of the MAAECF must be considered due to the investment of federal dollars and teacher involvement. Furthermore, the results of this study will be used to inform administrators and teachers in the southern Mississippi gulf coast districts as to how teachers report issues involved in administering the MAAECF. Although data collected from this research were limited to the sample and not subjected to statistical test to determine generalization to other populations, the findings may prove helpful for guiding curriculum and instruction for students in Mississippi schools identified as having severe cognitive disabilities. The data from this study may also help school districts in identifying improved assessment practices for students with severe cognitive disabilities.

Operational Definitions

The following terms are defined to identify their use within this study.

Alternate assessment. This term refers to a form of student assessment used in place of standardized tests for the purpose of measuring a student's knowledge or ability (Mississippi Department of Education, 2008-2009).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. This term refers to a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation (Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 104 Stat. 1142, 2004).

Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Frameworks (MAAECF). This term refers to a part of the Mississippi statewide assessment system designed to assess the educational performance of students with disabilities who cannot meaningfully take the Mississippi curriculum tests even with accommodations (Mississippi Department of Education, 2008-2009).

Special education teachers. This term refers to teachers who have been licensed by Mississippi Department of Education in various counties of the Mississippi gulf coast who were employed during the 2011-2012 school year (Mississippi Department of Education, 2011a) who administer the MAAECF to students who are eligible under the category of severe cognitive disabilities.

Student with severe cognitive disability. This term refers to a student whose intellectual functioning is measured two to three or greater than three standard deviations below the norm on individually administered psycho-educational assessment of intellectual functioning and is identified as eligible for special education services based on Mississippi state criteria for entry into special education (Mississippi Department of Education, 2003).

Assumptions

The following assumptions were presented to decrease threats to the validity of the study:

1. Questionnaire is structured in a format to establish internal validity.
2. Questionnaire is reasonably calculated to disengage bias and inform the research questions.

3. Questionnaire is clearly stated affording all participants the same understanding of the intended meaning of the questions.
4. Forced-choice responses were employed to require participants to take a stand on a single side of an issue with no option for a neutral response.
5. Participants in the study gave adequate effort to responses by engaging in reflective practice to provide information that accurately described their beliefs and experiences.
6. Participants in the study refrained from providing responses based on political stance or personal feelings about NCLB.
7. Data collected were assumed to follow the normal distribution.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were identified as factors that limited or prevented generalizations of the findings of this study:

1. The participants in this study were volunteers. The results may be biased from the viewpoint of education and involvement with the MAAECF.
2. The content and scope of this study was limited to special education teachers in various counties of the Mississippi gulf coast who teach and assess students with cognitive disabilities.

Organization of the Remaining Chapters of the Study

The remaining chapters of this study provide the context for investigation of the problem regarding the extent to which educators in six counties of the Mississippi gulf coast perceive the MAAECF provides an accurate measurement of performance for students with severe cognitive disabilities. It also provided information as to whether the

data obtained from the MAAECF are guiding curriculum and instruction for students with cognitive disabilities in the various county schools and also how Mississippi special education teachers rate the quality of training for administration of the MAAECF.

Chapter II provides an analysis and synthesis of current educational literature related to the goals and importance of alternate assessment in regards to students with severe cognitive disabilities. A review of special education laws, mandates, and legislation will be presented to provide insight into the question of whether mandated changes in special education policy have resulted in efficient revisions in instructional practices for students with severe cognitive disabilities.

Chapter III of this study describes the research design and method. The population for the study is teachers in various counties of the Mississippi gulf coast who taught and administered the MAAECF to students with severe cognitive disabilities for the 2011-2012 school year. A quantitative research design was employed; the researcher developed and disseminated an instrument to participants to determine the extent of perceived importance and use of data in regards to the MAAECF.

Results of this study are reported in Chapter IV by disaggregating the data into categories based on the information received. Appropriate statistical analyses were applied to determine the difference among the mean scores of the groups. Lastly, Chapter V provides conclusions and discussions of the findings and recommendations for further study. Finally, references and appendices are included to provide supporting documentation, including letters, forms, and the questionnaire used in the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a review of literature and research pertaining to the current legislation and reform in the U.S. public education system, with a concentration on the assessment of students with severe disabilities. The chapter begins with a discussion of standards-based reform as the theoretical framework for the study. Following this discussion, a comprehensive summary of the movement of special education and legislation is included that encompasses a time line of the legislation and policies that helped increase services and accountability for students with severe disabilities. To understand the extent of the changes made through legislation in the field of special education, a view is provided of the history of special education and how the changes affected accountability for children with severe cognitive disabilities and the student's service providers. An overview of the legislation requiring the alternate assessment mandate is provided and includes a review of curriculum and best practices that have evolved through the years via legislation and policies for students with severe disabilities. These changes have also brought to the forefront challenges in the development of the alternate assessment. Teachers also face challenges in implementing the alternate assessments resulting from the changes in legislation and policy. Finally, the chapter will end with an in-depth review of the MAAECF and how the alternate assessment has adhered to the legislation and policies of the times.

Theoretical Foundation

Education reform is not new to Americans. In the late 1970s, educational reform sought ways to improve student achievement by changing educational organizations,

procedures, and ideas (Ladd, 1996). Then, in the 1980s, the focus shifted to improving educational outcomes. McLaughlin and Rhim-Morando (2007) noted this shift in structure came about because of “pressure to ensure that students are adequately prepared to enter the workforce, in an increasingly global economy; and a fixation with managerial efficiency” (p. 26). By the late 1990s, the American public still wanted and demanded a better quality of schools for their children and saw the need for improved accountability measures for their educational outcomes (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The focus in education shifted from “the process of education to the outcomes of the educational process” (Geenen, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1995, p. 1).

The results of “the process of education to the outcomes of the educational process” (Geenen et al., 1995, p. 1) necessitated educational standards and educational outcomes to rely on the use of high-stakes assessments to signify and quantify the educational progress (Zatta & Pullin, 2004). Congress endorsed and extended its commitment to the mandates of the NCLB Act of 2001 through the endorsement of standards-based reform (Zatta & Pullin, 2004). This law requires annual testing of students to include those with severe cognitive disabilities. The policy also requires school districts to determine whether schools are making adequate yearly progress in academic standards by using valid and reliable measures and publicly reporting the outcomes of the assessments (NCLB, 2001). The principle behind standards-based reform requires states to set higher standards for students in the areas of performance. The students’ performance is then measured against given standards via assessments. If need be, schools are given the ability to overhaul the areas of concern for students to reach those said standards (instruction and curriculum) while holding schools accountable

for meeting performance standards (NCLB, 2001). The expectant outcome for standards-based reform is for students to meet and possibly exceed those standards (Zatta & Pullin, 2004).

According to Zatta and Pullin (2004), standards-based reform relies on three main components: content standards, performance assessments, and accountability.

McDonnell, McLaughlin, and Morison (1997) stated that content standards were the major focal point in standard-based reform and noted, “They define the breadth and depth of valued knowledge that students are expected to learn, and they are intended to reduce the curriculum disparities existing across schools and school districts” (p. 31). The performance assessment component is used to meet the criteria for guaranteeing accountability in meeting the goals of academic content standards (Zatta & Pullin, 2004). The accountability component, however, takes two forms in standards-based reform. The first is student accountability defined as turning over some responsibility to students, and the second is system accountability defined as giving some responsibility to the educational system or those tied to the educational system (Zatta & Pullin, 2004).

History of Special Education Curriculum

As legislation and laws changed, guiding the growth of special education in public schools, so did the curriculum and instruction for students who were eligible under IDEA of 1997 (Browder et al., 2004). Browder et al. (2004) explained that educators who taught students with severe cognitive disabilities now had to delve into a new territory by having to create programs with meaning and substance for their students. The 1970s found schools using the developmental model (Browder et al., 2004). This model was based on the notion that focusing on a student’s mental age rather than his or

her chronological age would be the best way to teach students with severe cognitive disabilities (Browder et al., 2004). Soon after the developmental model, a philosophy of encouraging practical, age-appropriate skills to help develop self-determining living competences and access to the community called functional curriculum philosophy emerged (Browder et al., 2004). The basis of home, community, recreation, and employment served as the underpinning of the functional curriculum (Browder et al., 2004).

According to Browder et al. (2004), the mid-1980s and early 1990s special education curriculum moved toward the social inclusion model. This model allowed students with severe cognitive disabilities the opportunity to integrate with their nondisabled peers for the sole purpose of interaction, forming friendships, and practicing social skills (i.e., turn taking, communication). The mid-1990s brought about the self-determination model, which promoted choice making and goal setting (Browder et al., 2004). This model focused on students with severe cognitive disabilities making choices about their own lives.

As the 1990s progressed and students with severe cognitive disabilities were making strides, an importance on access to the general curriculum came into the forefront. The general curriculum access model was brought about based on the emphasis that all students, including those with severe cognitive disabilities, could learn and should be given the opportunity to do so in the general setting (IDEIA, 2004). The general curriculum access model embraced a philosophy that stresses differentiated instruction and the importance of linking curriculum to academic skills. This model ensured that students with severe cognitive disabilities were being taught grade-level

content (Browder et al., 2004). The grade-level content that is being taught is based upon achievement standards. For this reason, progress for students with severe cognitive disabilities must then be assessed by means of a state alternate assessment (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Legislation and Policy

The innate changes behind educational reform in the United States have been guided by the hand of the federal government through legislation. This is most noted in the area of special education with reauthorization of the IDEA (Browder et al., 2005). No longer will students with severe disabilities attend school for the sake of attaining developmental skills, functional skills, or possible work skills (Browder et al., 2005). The curriculum for special education students is now set to include students with severe cognitive disabilities in the general education classes to teach severe cognitive disability students the state standards, while also including the students in high-stakes accountability measures (Browder et al., 2005). In addition to the above educational demands for students with severe cognitive disabilities NCLB (2001) also consists of requirements for teachers of students with severe cognitive disabilities. These requirements come in the form of meeting highly qualified status and participating in continuing staff development (NCLB, 2001).

With the passage of IDEA in 1997, the NCLB Act of 2001, and IDEIA of 2004, states, districts, and schools have been working to revamp the way children with severe disabilities are taught and assessed. According to Hunter (as cited in Mistretta, 2008), this change in legislation has presented an exceptionally difficult problem in an area of special education where key emphasis has moved from obtaining access to “educational

services” (p. 13) for all children to guaranteeing students with severe disabilities meet state standards on high-stakes testing.

Prior to the passage of the EAHCA of 1970 and the amendments in 1975, there were no laws governing the admittance of students with disabilities in public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). This law, enacted by the U.S. Congress, required all public schools that were receiving federal funds make available equal entrance to education for children with physical and mental disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Schools along with parental input were required to develop educational plans for students with disabilities that would parallel the education of their nondisabled peers (Yell, M. L., 1997). Through many amendments and law suits by parents of children with disabilities, Congress once again made changes to improve the educational services and treatment of these children (Mistretta, 2008).

In 1990, Congress passed an amendment to the EAHCA, but in 1997, the legislation was renamed the IDEA. In 2004, Congress slightly revised the name of the legislation to the IDEIA. By including the word improvement in the name of the legislation, Congress focused educators on the intent that all students improve academic performance (Mistretta, 2008). The changes were intended to end segregation of students with disabilities from their nondisabled peers, enact due process for parents, require states and LEAs to meet minimum federal special education standards, and require improved educational and transitional results for students with disabilities (IDEIA, 2004).

At the turn of the century, the Clinton administration established legislation known as Goals 2000: Educate America (1994). This outcomes-based education reform legislation required schools to ensure that all students reach their full potential as

evidenced by data collected to measure, compare, sort, analyze, and categorize student performance. Goals 2000: Educate America mandated public school districts correct academic deficits identified through the analysis of these data. Passage of the IDEA of 1997 mandated that students with disabilities be included in regular assessment programs with accommodations, if necessary, and that states and the LEA provide alternate assessments for those students deemed unable to participate in content standards assessments (IDEA, 1997). In 2001, Congress passed the NCLB Act, which outlined expectations for states and LEAs to ensure that school districts performed adequately each year based on student achievement scores on high-stakes accountability testing. Furthermore, this legislation emphasized that all children, including those with severe cognitive disabilities, be included in accountability measures (NCLB, 2001). The reauthorization of the IDEIA of 2004 stated that accountability for student achievement applies to all subgroups, including students who are eligible for special education services to include students with even the most severe disabilities. Along with assessing all students, documentation of all state and district assessments given and how well each subgroup did or did not do must be provided to the public (IDEIA, 2004).

As the NCLB Act has been implemented, states have experienced challenges in meeting the expected accountability measures in the law (Resmovits, 2012). As a result of these challenges, the Obama administration has been faced with responding to the needs of the schools in various states (Resmovits, 2012). In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education granted waivers to 33 states to exempt them from rigorous test requirements. Mississippi was included among the states that received waivers (Resmovits, 2012). The waivers are contingent on the state's adoption of policies that

include college and career-ready standards and the evaluation of teachers using students' performance on standardized test as one part of the teacher evaluation criteria (Resmovits, 2012). The request for an NCLB waiver submitted by Mississippi Department of Education indicated that Mississippi intends to comply with the requirements of the waiver. The requested waiver included a commitment on the part of the Mississippi Department of Education (2012c) to the following principles: college and career expectation for all students, state-developed differentiated recognition, accountability and support, and support of effective instruction and leadership.

Highly Qualified Teacher

NCLB of 2001 and IDEIA of 2004 have increased accountability in various areas of public education (Roach et al., 2007). In addition to increased standards for student outcomes, teacher certification standards have also changed. Under the requirement of NCLB and IDEIA, teachers not only have to make sure every student, including students identified as having severe cognitive disabilities, meets the ever-increasing standards of accountability for learning, but the teachers themselves must meet the conditions of becoming highly qualified (NCLB, 2001). In an article by Safier (2007), the purpose behind the highly qualified requirement in NCLB was explained as making sure teachers are "better prepared for the task of promoting academic achievement by all students" (p. 66).

According to the NCLB Act, the term *highly qualified* means teachers who teach core academic subjects must have at least a bachelor's degree, full state certification, and proven competency in the subject areas they teach (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006). According to Mississippi Department of Education (2012b), teachers who teach out of

their subject matter, teach more than one subject, or teach all subjects, which is the case for most special education teachers, must now abide by the provisions set forth to ensure students are taught by skilled staff. In order for Mississippi teachers to obtain the highly qualified status, the Mississippi Department of Education (2012b) requires special education teachers to take the Praxis II Fundamental Subjects K-12 test, 0511, which assesses content in language arts, math, science, and social studies, although the special education students must be working below grade level (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012b).

In a national study conducted by Kossar, Mitchem, and Ludlow (2005), teachers, administrators, parents, and policy makers were asked their perceptions of the NCLB Act requirements pertaining specifically to adequate yearly progress and highly qualified teachers. Eppley (2009) noted many participants convey their apprehensions of a negative impact NCLB has on finding, hiring, and retaining highly qualified teachers (especially in rural areas). It was also noted the participants in the study felt special education teachers should be considered highly qualified based on their certification and should not be required to obtain the highly qualified status by taking more classes or enduring more testing (Kossar et al., 2005).

Professional Development

A review of the literature revealed that professional development can positively impact not only the performance of teachers in the classroom but also the achievement of their students (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Program formats, such as peer-to-peer support models, supervisor with master teacher models, and online teacher programs, are preferred to the

more outdated and more expensive guest speakers (Erickson, Noonan, & McCall, 2012). Becoming familiar with current best practices in professional development and then implementing programs that meet this standard is essential to the future of an effective, efficient educational system (Sprague, 2006).

Professional development for teachers who are required to administer the alternate assessment must meet the standards set forth in the research. According to the Mississippi Department of Education (2012a), professional development for teachers administering the MAAECF can be accessed through three delivery models: on line, face to face, and train-the-trainer model. A signature is required for each participant indicating attendance at the training as well as proficiency in administering the assessment (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012a). Participants must meet fidelity standards as measured by a quiz before being approved to administer the alternate assessment (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012a). Added fidelity measures during administration of the assessment include a monitor, second rater for specific sections of the test, and videotape of sessions that are scored using a fidelity rubric (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012a). To guarantee further that the MAAECF is administered correctly, the Mississippi Department of Education (2007) will annually conduct “random monitoring of assessment evidence and rating results” (p. 22).

Other documentation to ensure fidelity includes submission of the portfolio including acceptable evidence of student performance. Staff qualified to administer the alternate assessment must be a special education teacher or other licensed professional who works with the student and is trained in assessment procedures (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012a). Each student’s portfolio must include a signed ethics

and data-collection form, progress determination form, and a medial form (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012a).

Components of Curriculum

IDEIA (2004) stipulates that all children have access to a free appropriate public education that prepares them for further education, employment, and independent living. With this goal in mind, the curriculum for students with severe cognitive disabilities differs from the general education curriculum. The Mississippi state extended standards for students with severe cognitive disabilities include content in language arts, mathematics, and science. Appendix A illustrates standards for content and grade level for each of these three areas.

Academic performance assessed on the MAAECF includes the following:

1. Language arts classes require six objectives in Grades three-eight and Grade 12.
2. Mathematics requires seven objectives in Grades three and four and six objectives in Grades five through eight.
3. Science requires seven objectives in Grades five, eight, and 12. (Science is not assessed (or required) for Grades three, four, six, and seven (Mississippi Department of Education, 2011b).

Assessment Pros and Cons

In education, assessments have been used to measure overall student performance, distribution of funds to schools, ascertaining schools that need support, and other decisions (Baker & Linn, 2002). The NCLB Act of 2001 mandated testing for all students to include those with significant cognitive disabilities.

The mandate required testing to be aligned to state standards and the outcome of the assessments to be reported as accountability measures for the district, teachers, and states. A review of the research on assessment identified voices for and against high-stakes testing. In their research on validity issues for accountability systems, Baker and Linn (2002) reported a large majority of stakeholders at all levels in the educational system believed high-stakes assessments tend to motivate students and improve their chances for a better future.

In a report by Christie, Griffith, Ziebarth, Walker, and Weiss (2001), advocates for assessment cited the following positive attributes: tracking of year-to-year growth in student learning, determining if and how well the curriculum is aligned to state standards, and finding which students are behind and how to best help them. Use of these assessments assists educators in implementing effective preventions and interventions rather than moving towards special education as an educational option (Christie et al., 2001). These efforts lead to an increase in the number of children participating in the general education program, which translates into higher student expectations and outcomes (Christie et al., 2001).

Those who oppose assessment argued that testing narrows the focus of curriculum, emphasizes rote memory, and interferes with effective learning and teaching practices (Christie et al., 2001). Moreover, one study reported that use of high-stakes accountability assessments may inadvertently increase the dropout rates. In addition, this study revealed that assessments do not test creative thinking or problem solving and schools and students who do not perform well are penalized rather than aided (Webster-Graf, 2011).

In summary, assessments provide states, districts, parents, and teachers with a measure of how the educational system is performing. Assessment practices also provide a picture of how well students are learning the content taught. Assessments will continue to be a topic of controversy at all levels of education (Hardman & Dawson, 2008). Until the next idea that can incorporate measures of accountability, student learning, and alignment of curriculum to state standards, assessments will continue to be used to provide the information demanded by stakeholders (Hardman & Dawson, 2008).

Population

Prior to IDEA 1997, students with disabilities were often exempted or not included in state-wide assessments (Browder et al., 2005). IDEA 1997 required that students with disabilities be included in state and local assessment systems; however, not all states complied (Browder et al., 2005). This was mostly due to the challenging demands that students with severe disabilities presented to educators (Browder & Cooper-Duffy, 2003; Browder et al., 2003; Browder et al., 2004).

The students who are now required by law to be included in statewide assessment are those with distinct, yet diverse disabilities (Towles-Reeves, Kearns, Kleinert, & Kleinert, 2009). This group of students includes those who have severe cognitive disabilities, severe autism, deaf or blindness, or multiple disabilities (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009). These students may have difficulties in expressive and receptive communication and may use augmentative and alternative communication systems (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009). In addition, these students may have attention and engagement issues as well as motor problems that increase the challenge of developing appropriate items to obtain valid assessment conditions (Schafer & Lissitz, 2009).

In addition to these difficulties, these students also require extended time for skill acquisition, maintenance, and generalization (Kleinert, Browder, & Towles-Reeves, 2009). This group of students may also have health care needs that present “unique access challenges for instruction and assessment conditions” (Schafer & Lissitz, 2009, p. 9). Based on these characteristics and other factors, these students would be likely candidates for participation in the state alternate curriculum as well as the state alternate assessment.

Alternate Assessment Mandate

Historically, students with disabilities participated in assessments that were determined by the special education teacher and driven by the student’s IEP. The objectives and goals of the student’s IEP were practically the only accountability measure and the single driving force behind a student’s educational endeavor (Eisenberg, 2006). However, IDEA 1997 authorized all students, including those with severe cognitive disabilities, to be given access to the general education curriculum and to be taught grade-level content, along with being assessed to determine their knowledge of the curriculum.

To ensure that students with all types of disabilities were included in all aspects of education, the NCLB Act (2001) added the requirement that students with disabilities be included in the statewide accountability measures and be counted in the results of such measures. IDEIA 2004 added to the accountability measures by appending to the amendment that “states and districts must issue reports to the public about state and district assessments, alternate assessments, and the performance of children with

disabilities on assessments” (Wrightslaw, 2011, Reports to the Public section, para. 1) in reading, mathematics, and science.

According to Standards and Assessment Peer Review Guidance through the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and the U.S. Department of Education, *alternate assessment* is defined as an assessment designed for the small number of students with disabilities who are unable to participate in the regular state assessment even with appropriate accommodations (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). These legislative mandates created unique problems for all concerned. Rabinowitz, Sato, Case, Benitez, and Jordan (2008) found many states had tremendous difficulty ascertaining alternate content standards and finding a curriculum that was parallel to and aligned with the general education curricula, while still taking into consideration the unique needs of each student with a disability being assessed. Creating, implementing, and administering valid and reliable alternate assessments within the guidelines of the NCLB Act and being able to find teachers who can teach the curricula and administer the assessments within the time frame given by the federal government were among some of the more reservations identified.

Although the above laws mandated students with severe cognitive disabilities be included in state and district assessments and accountability measures, the laws themselves did not mandate how the “states should develop alternate assessments policies or procedures” (Rabinowitz et al., 2008, p. 4). This aperture left states to create their own version of what they felt would best work for them based on the states’ knowledge of those being assessed and the guiding principles of the NCLB Act (Thurlow, 2004).

Challenges States Faced With Developing Alternate Assessments

Rabinowitz et al. (2008) completed research through the CAARES about alternate assessments for special education in the southwest region states. Through the study, five main challenges emerged as states implemented their alternate assessment policies and practices. The first challenge found by Rabinowitz et al. was to figure out who would participate in the alternate assessment. Next, educators had to identify what content would be measured. The third challenge discovered in the research by Rabinowitz et al., (2008) was to define technical adequacy for the assessment, and the fourth challenge was to create an assessment that was reliable and valid. Finally, the fifth challenge was focused on how to define proficient performance (Rabinowitz et al., 2008).

Challenges Faced by Teachers

Special education teachers have also been greatly affected by the changes of federal and state legislation and policy. The mandates of IDEIA (2004) support first-rate, concentrated training and professional development for all who work with children with disabilities. This training is to ensure that the teachers, aides, and administrators have the “skills and knowledge necessary to improve the academic achievement and functional performance of children with disabilities, including the use of scientifically based instructional practices, to the maximum extent possible” (IDEIA, 2004, para. 3).

In the past, most changes brought about in education overlooked teachers’ opinions about what was best for their students. In research conducted by Wangber (as cited in Kampfer et al., 2001), 63% of teachers surveyed felt that education reform had been implemented without any input from them. Of the teachers surveyed, 61% of

educators believed the achieved reforms took into account concerns of the administrators and not the teachers (Wangber, as cited in Kampfer et al., 2001).

In most states, it is special education teachers who administer the alternate assessments to students with severe cognitive disabilities (Kampfer et al., 2001). Research conducted by Kampfer et al. (2001) and Kleinert, Kennedy, and Kearns (1999) have shown that teachers can serve as a vital part of the review and improvement of assessment practice. With that in mind, other researchers such as Cameto et al. (2010) and Roach et al. (2007) looked to focus on teacher concerns in regard to alternate assessments. Through studies focusing on teacher concerns with assessing student learning, researchers have reported teachers spending a significant amount of time outside of the classroom preparing for the assessment procedures (Ezell, Klein, & Ezell-Powell, 1999; Kampfer et al., 2001; Koretz, Barron, Mitchell, & Stecher, 1996). Teachers were also concerned about the reliability of scoring the assessment (Kampfer et al., 2001). Teachers reported their belief that the assessment was designed to evaluation the teacher rather than the student (Kleinert et al., 1999). Some teachers indicated the amount of assistance and support provided by states was very low and they often felt secluded (Kampfer et al., 2001). Flowers et al. (2005) noted only 28% of teachers who responded to the survey believed their students had more access to the general education programs than prior to the reauthorized IDEIA (2004). Only 25% of the teachers who responded to the survey reported any growth in objectives on their students IEPs. A mere 25% of those who responded also seemed to report a better quality of education since the implementation of the alternate assessment (Flowers et al., 2005).

Research by Kleinert et al. (1999) revealed positive impact in the area of improvements in instructional programming among students with severe cognitive disabilities. The same research revealed teachers are generally encouraged about the inclusion of students with severe cognitive disabilities in the state accountability practices (Kleinert et al., 1999).

Mississippi's Alternate Assessment of the Extended Curriculum Frameworks

In order to abide by NCLB 2001 and IDEIA 2004, Mississippi needed to develop and put in place a curriculum and an alternate assessment for students with severe cognitive disabilities that were reliable and valid (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). The Mississippi Department of Education formed a team composed of state directors, university professors, researchers, and superintendents. In June of 2004, this team became known as the Alternate Assessment Leadership Team. The first order of business was to develop another team identified as the Alternate Assessment Workgroup (AAW), which included parents, special education teachers, and special education administrators from across the state of Mississippi (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). The AAW would eventually work through the challenges that emerged similar to a study conducted by Rabinowitz et al. (2008). The AAW would also create the MAAECF. The MAAECF became Mississippi's answer to the mandates of IDEA (1997), NCLB (2001), and IDEIA (2004). According to the *Mississippi Alternate Assessment Technical Manual* for the MAAECF, the purpose of the assessment is not only to follow mandated federal and state laws but also provide information to all concerned about,

individual students' achievement of specific knowledge and skills in Language Arts (Reading and Writing) and Mathematics which are aligned with the state's Extended Curriculum Frameworks. The achievement of students with significant cognitive disabilities, as a group relative to expectations articulated by alternate grade-cluster proficiency (achievement) standards with grade-specific cut scores. The progress of students with significant cognitive disabilities, as a group, relative to the expectations for progress set by the state in the form of an Adequate Yearly Progress index. (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007, p. 2)

There are eight steps identified in the assessment process according the Mississippi Department of Education (2011b) Office of Student Assessment, which include the following:

Step 1: Identify Whether or Not the Student Meets the Participation Criteria for the MAAECF

Step 2: Identify Whether the Student Will Be Assessed through the Progress or Attainment Assessment Type

Step 3: Identify the MECF Objectives for Assessment

Step 4: Develop an Instructional Plan to Assess the Student

Step 5: Collect Baseline Evidence

Step 6: Provide Instruction on the MECF Objectives and Collect Secondary Evidence

Step 7: Collect Final Evidence

Step 8: Score the Student Evidence. (p. 9)

Elliott, Roach, Kaase, and Kettler (2009) noted the MAAECF utilizes a “standards-focused, comprehensive rating scale used to assess students’ achievement” (p. 242). Teachers use observation of skills performed during daily classroom instruction and work samples of their student’s class work as evidence of knowledge on items being assessed (Mississippi Department of Education, 2011b). These items are pulled from a bank of objectives in the Mississippi Extended Curriculum Framework (MECF), (Mississippi Department of Education, 2011b). According to Elliott et al. (2009), selection of specific items from the bank are aligned with the students’ IEPs and scored using objective multidimensional rubrics. The items on the assessment are required to be more complicated as students’ progress in their education. The MAAECF measures the achievement of students with severe cognitive disabilities in the areas of language arts, mathematics, and science (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). In these content areas, students’ scores are converted to proficiency descriptors and assigned to grade-level achievement (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). The levels are minimal, basic, proficient, and advanced. The MAAECF also requires two or more raters for check and balance purposes (Elliott et al., 2009).

Not unlike the concerns and challenges of Rabinowitz et al. (2008), Mississippi developers of the alternate assessment found themselves facing similar challenges (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). However, according to Mississippi Department of Education (2007), the AAW faced an additional challenge rather than the five challenges identified by Rabinowitz et al. (2008). while developing the alternate assessment. Like the findings from the CAARES, the AAW was charged with deciding participants and content for the alternate assessment, creating an accessible assessment,

creating a reliable and valid alternate assessment, and providing high-quality training and support to educators (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). The AAW identified the sixth challenge as the need to define a system of proficiency for performance on the alternate assessment (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007).

Mississippi's solutions to the six challenges were identified and addressed through the teamwork of the AAW. In Challenge 1, deciding who should participate in the alternate assessments, Mississippi reviewed their state's definition of significant cognitive disability and its guidelines for participation in the alternate assessment. They determined the guidelines for participation were sound and reasonable and that the participation rates for students with severe cognitive disabilities would be limited to no more than 2% of the state's eligible student population (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). Challenge 2, deciding what content the alternate assessment should measure, was tackled by a group of 45 individuals who represented general and special educators, parents, special education advocates, and university faculty from across the state (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). The extended content standard the team developed is known as the MECF. The MECF is systematized according to a "four-level hierarchical structure, with the most general level being a content area" (Elliott et al., 2009, p. 241). Each content area is made up of numerous content strands that incorporate various competencies. Each competency can be further defined by specific objectives (Elliott et al., 2009).

Challenge 3, creating an accessible assessment, was accomplished by using Thompson, Johnstone, and Thurlow's (2002) universal design principles. Universally designed assessments, as defined by Thompson et al. (2002), are those assessments

“designed and developed from the beginning to allow participation of the widest possible range of students and to result in valid inferences about performance for all students who participate in the assessment” (p. 5). This type of assessment was developed to add a “dimension of fairness to the testing process” (Thompson et al., 2002, p. 5).

Challenge 4, creating reliable and valid alternate assessments, was solved by the development and use of the MAAECF item-rating rubric. This rubric uses a multidimensional approach for the “collection of evidence and the quantification of judgments about students’ knowledge skill on items” (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007, p. 20), which have been aligned with the state’s extended curriculum frameworks. In order to satisfy the requirement of validity in the assessment, it is noted the evidence collected and then rated by the teachers must demonstrate the knowledge. This scoring process is said to support the foundation for gauging the reliability and validity of the resulting test scores.

To provide a remedy for Challenge 5, training and supporting educators to conduct high-quality assessments, the Mississippi Department of Education (2007) resorted to provide yearly “regional professional development sessions designed to train educators to use the MAAECF with high integrity” (p. 22). The Mississippi Department of Education (2007) also developed a website that can be accessed by teachers to “address Frequently Asked Questions and provide case illustrations of the use of the MAAECF” (p. 22). The Mississippi Department of Education requires teachers who administer the MAAECF to participate in a 1-day training service and pass a quiz. Participants can choose training in person or electronically using the Internet. To guarantee further that the MAAECF is administered correctly, the Mississippi

Department of Education (2007) will annually conduct “random monitoring of assessment evidence and rating results” (p. 22).

Finally, in response to Challenge 6, defining proficient performance on alternate assessments, a group of educators who were knowledgeable in “curricular and instructional needs of students with disabilities” (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007, p. 23) and who also were familiar with alternate assessment came together to develop the Standard Setting Committee (SSC). The SSC used a procedure called A Bookmark Procedure developed by Lewis, Mitzel, and Green in 1996. Mitzel, Lewis, Patz, and Green (2001) (as cited in Cizek, 2001) explained the procedure as follows:

The Bookmark Procedure simultaneously accommodate (a) selected-response and constructed-response test formats, (b) simplify the cognitive complexity required of standard setting judges, (c) connect the judgment task of setting cut scores to the measurement model, and (d) connect test content with performance level descriptors. (p. 250)

Through this endeavor, the SSC was able to obtain “grade-level cut scores” (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007, p. 22) and improved “performance level descriptions for each content area” (p. 23) of the MAAECF.

The Mississippi Department of Education redesigned its alternate assessment based on the extended curriculum frameworks alternate achievement levels during the 2008-2009 school year. Perie (2009) noted the Mississippi Department of Education wanted to “better improve the alignment with the new grade-level content standards and to increase the academic rigor of the assessment” (p. 1). According to the MAAECF’s standard Setting Report, the new MAAECF is no longer a comprehensive rating scale;

it is how an evidence collection assessment that entails teachers collecting baseline data for selected objectives (Perie, 2009). The teacher must teach the designated objectives and then collect final data on the student's achievement. For each subject assessed, the content is divided into three to five clusters that emphasize the main ideas in the content for that grade and subject. It is noted the number of objectives in each cluster to be assessed is predetermined. It is the teachers' discretion to select the objectives (Perie, 2009). Once the items have been administered and the data have been collected, the students' work is rated on two dimensions: performance and complexity (Perie, 2009). To assess performance, Perie said the MAAECF uses the attainment rubric, which "measures the degree of accuracy when the work is completed independently" (p. 4).

Most students are assessed using the attainment rubric. For those students who are "presymbolic" or students who communicate by means such as gestures, eye gaze, and purposeful moving to object and sounds, performance is measured using a progress rubric that tracks the amount of change between baseline and final measure. This system allows for the evaluator to use judgment in observing the response rather than requiring an exact spoken response to record the answer (Perie, 2009). All students who are participating in the MAAECF are measured on the complexity dimension. The complexity dimension assesses the starting point of student learning and progresses to the application of the material learned. Perie (2009) indicated that according to Mississippi Department of Education, any student who is assessed via the progress rubric "cannot attain proficiency" (p. 4). These students will be recognized as "basic" in the adequate yearly progress calculations.

Literature Review Summary

The literature review for this study provides a strong foundation to support inquiry as to the effectiveness of the use of the MAAECF for children with significant cognitive disabilities. The theoretical foundation of the study is framed by standards-based reform. A thorough review of related legislation and educational policy was provided. Moreover, the relevant history that was shaped by the laws and policies was articulated as rationale for development of the legislation. The NCLB Act of 2001 and the IDEIA of 2004 require students with significant cognitive disabilities to be included in accountability measures and increase their participation in the general education curriculum (IDEIA, 2004; NCLB, 2001).

A general review of assessment practices information is provided including literature that debates the pros and cons of assessment practices. Finally, information on the alternate assessment process as defined in IDEIA (2004) was reviewed. The alternate assessment mandate was detailed including the challenges Mississippi faced with the development of the MAAECF as well as challenges encountered by teachers who administer the assessment. A description of the MAAECF, which was the focus of the study, completes the literature review.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III of this study describes the research design and method for addressing the research questions and hypotheses. The detail for participants, including the population and samples, is provided. The research design and procedures for the study detail the specific instrumentation for conducting the research along with a description of the data-collection process and statistical method of data analysis.

Research Questions

This study examined the use of the MAAECF with regard to the extent to which the results of the assessment have guided or changed curriculum and instruction for students with severe cognitive disabilities. The study also examined teacher opinion of the quality of training and support that is provided before, during, and after the assessment is given. The study examined teacher responses to the following research questions:

1. To what extent did special education teachers report that the MAAECF provided an accurate assessment of performance for students with severe cognitive disabilities?
2. To what extent and in what ways did special education teachers report the results of the MAAECF were used in making curricular and instructional decisions for students identified as having severe cognitive disabilities in Mississippi schools?
3. What was the reported extent and quality of training programs for special education teachers who administered the MAAECF?

4. How did special education teachers report the influence of training (i.e., support, feedback, and student interaction) compared to the accuracy, usefulness, and quality of the MAAECF?

The hypotheses for Research Question 4 were as follows:

H₁: In regard to accuracy in measuring student performance, the training component of the MAAECF makes more difference than support, feedback, and student interaction.

H₂: With regard to usefulness of the results of the MAAECF, the student interaction component of the MAAECF makes the most difference to Mississippi special education teachers.

H₃: With regard to the quality of administering the MAAECF, training and student interaction has more influence than support and feedback as reported by Mississippi special education teachers.

H₄: Overall, Mississippi special education teachers from various counties on the gulf coast perceive the use of the MAAECF as beneficial.

Participants in the Study

The population for this study was 1,050 special education teachers in Mississippi who administered the MAAECF during the 2011-2012 school year. After obtaining permission from the superintendent of the school district (see Appendixes B, C, and D), a convenience sample (Robson, 1993) of 123 special education teachers were selected, which represented the total number of special education teachers in six counties of the Mississippi gulf coast region. The researcher contacted the Mississippi Department of Education Special Education Department to obtain the specific number of teachers (of the

six counties of the Mississippi gulf coast) who administered the MAAECF to students with severe cognitive disabilities and the number of students who participated in the assessment.

Research Design and Procedures

There are two basic types of education research: descriptive research and experimental research. According to Creswell (2003) and McMillan and Wergin (2010), *descriptive research* is defined as a study in which the goal is to deduce a precise profile of a population, events, or situations. Descriptive research answers the questions who, what, where, when, and how. *Experimental research* is defined as experiments that are conducted to predict phenomenon or an experiment that is created to explain some kind of relationship (Creswell, 2003; McMillan & Wergin, 2010). Descriptive research may be quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of both. This study incorporated a quantitative approach to data collection but also used a correlational design to investigate the relationship among variables. The instrumentation for this study was a researcher-designed structure survey, The Alternate Assessment Rating Scale (AARS). A descriptive research design yielding quantitative data was utilized. The population for the study was Mississippi special education teachers in the southern various counties of the Mississippi gulf coast who taught and administered the MAAECF.

Data-Collection Process

A survey was developed and disseminated to participants to determine the extent of perceived importance and use of data in regards to the MAAECF. The procedures presented in this chapter describe the researcher's methods of ensuring that the study presented facts based on empirical evidence.

This research was conducted in the state of Mississippi. A self-reported questionnaire titled the AARS was used to obtain needed data. Data collected from this study were analyzed to provide teacher reports regarding the use of the MAAECF. Specifically, teachers responded to the accuracy of the assessment, use of the results of the assessment, quality of training programs, and significance of specific training components. The quality of training programs for administration of the MAAECF had to be considered due to the investment of federal dollars and teacher involvement.

A pilot study was conducted to further validate the research questions. The researcher started with a number of potential items (questions) for four teachers. From there the four teachers were asked them to mark out items they felt were not appropriate based on the topic of research. The researcher collected the items and compiled a new survey based on the responses for the four teachers. The researcher then asked special education teachers from the local school districts to help pilot test the items. Ten area special education teachers agreed. The pilot study was implemented with the instructions for the 10 teachers to answer the questions in a manner that reflected their own perceptions. Once the study was finished, the teachers were asked to provide verbal feedback. Their responses were audiotaped for future review and to evaluate the research questions. Results of the discussion confirmed that the research questions for this study appeared to be appropriate for probing the use of the alternate assessment for children with severe cognitive disabilities.

Instrumentation

The data for this research were collected using the AARS. The AARS is a 15-item, electronic survey that probes teacher perspectives and demographics of responders.

Data were collected and analyzed using a quantitative method. The survey was hosted by Survey Monkey, an online data analysis and support system. The research design for this study was nonexperimental. The data obtained from the AARS were subjected to inferential statistical analysis using SPSS, Version 21, which is a computer software program used to analyze quantitative data.

There were 10 questions related to the content of the survey and five questions related to demographics. Within the 10 questions, respondents were asked to mark the best answer that closely matched their experience with the MAAECF. Demographic questions polled the age, years of teaching experience, gender, and level of education for each respondent. The survey was sent via electronic mail (see Appendices E and F) to teachers who taught students with severe cognitive disabilities and had administered the MAAECF during the 2011-2012 school year in various counties of Mississippi.

Question 1 on the AARS provided data for Research Question 1. Questions 2 and 3 of the AARS provided data for Research Question 2. Question 3 of the AARS was the only question that asked the participants to “mark all that apply.” Questions 4 through 6 provided the data for Research Question 3 and Questions 7 through 9 provided data for Research Question 4. Question 10 on the AARS asked teachers how beneficial they perceived the use of the MAAECF to be. Questions 11 to 15 were the demographic question about age, length of teaching, gender, level of education, and highly qualified status. Participants were required to answer Questions 11, 12, 14, and 15 before continuing to the next question.

Analysis of the Results

The data from the questionnaire responses were analyzed to provide a summary of reports from special education teachers with regard to the use of the MAAECF.

Teachers responded to the accuracy of the assessment, use of the results of the assessment, quality of training programs, and the significance of specific training components. The quality of training programs for administration of the MAAECF had to be considered due to the investment of federal dollars and teacher involvement. SPSS, Version 21, was used for the statistical analysis. The following analyses were performed: frequencies, percentages, cross tabs with chi-square test of association to determine the degree of association between the variables, and one-sample chi-square tests to determine whether the observed frequencies were significantly different from the hypothesized frequencies.

Summary

The researcher collected information regarding scientific research-based instructional strategies. The research was conducted in the state of Mississippi. Descriptive research using quantitative data was conducted. Data collected from this study were analyzed using several statistical tests matched to the type of data received and the nature of the inquiry.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter includes a summary of the data analysis as it relates to the study on teacher perspective on the Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Frameworks (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). The data were collected using the Alternate Assessment Rating Scale (AARS). The AARS is a 15- item, electronic survey that probes teacher perspectives and demographics of responders. Data were collected and analyzed using a quantitative method. The survey was hosted by Survey Monkey, an online data analysis and support system. The research design for this study was nonexperimental in nature. The data obtained from the AARS were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS, Version 21, a computer software program used to perform statistical analysis on quantitative data.

There were 10 questions that were related to the content of the survey and five questions related to demographics. Within the 10 questions, participants were asked to describe their experience with the MAAECF. Demographic questions polled the age, years of teaching experience, gender, and level of education for each participant.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was special education teachers in Mississippi who administered the MAAECF during the 2011-2012 school year ($N = 1,050$). A convenience sample (Robson, 1993) of 123 special education teachers was selected, which represented the total number of special education teachers in various counties of the Mississippi Gulf Coast region. In order to obtain the specific number of teachers (of the various counties of the Mississippi Gulf Coast) who administered the MAAECF to

students with severe cognitive disabilities and the number of students who participated in the assessment, the researcher contacted the Mississippi Department of Education Special Education Department. Of the 123 teachers in the convenience sample, 81 teachers participated; this represented a 66% response rate. The participants were provided with a window of response time of 30 days.

Demographic Data Analysis

Along with specific questions about the MAAECF, the AARS also collected demographic information, which included age, length of teaching in the special education field, highest level of education, and whether participants were considered highly qualified as defined by the NCLB Act of 2001. Participants were asked to report their current age while responding to the AARS. Of the 81 respondents, 50 selected 21-29 or younger age group, 1 selected 18-20 years of age, 0 selected 17 or younger age group, 10 selected the 30-39 age group, 6 selected the 50-59 age group, and 3 selected ages 60 or older (see Table 1).

Table 1

Frequency of Reported Age

Age	Frequency	Percent
17 or younger	0	0.0
18-20	1	1.3
21-29	50	61.7
30-39	10	12.3
40-49	11	13.6

Table 1(continued).

Age	Frequency	Percent
50-59	6	7.4
60 or older	3	3.7
Total	81	100.0

As part of the demographics, participants were asked to identify their gender. Of the 81 respondents, 59 were female and 17 were male. Five participants did not respond to the gender question; as such, the total for gender was 76.

Participants were asked to specify how many years they had been in the special education field. Of the 81 participants, 29 selected 0-5 years, 18 selected 6-10 years, 22 selected 11-15 years, 11 selected 20-25 years, and 1 selected 26 or more years (see Table 2).

Table 2

Years of Experience Reported

Years of experience	Frequency	Percent
0-5	29	35.8
6-10	18	22.2
11-20	22	27.2
20-30	11	13.6
30 or more	1	1.2
Total	81	100.0

Participants were asked to specify their highest level of completed education. Of the 81 respondents, 37 held a bachelor's degree, 25 held a master's degree, 17 held specialist degrees, and two had a doctorate (see Table 3).

Participants were also asked to ascertain whether or not they were considered highly qualified by the guidelines of the NCLB Act of 2001. Of the 81 respondents, more than half (56) were considered highly qualified in the field of special education according to the guidelines of NCLB and 25 were not considered highly qualified in their field of work.

Table 3

Level of Education Completed

Level of education	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor	37	45.7
Masters	25	30.9
Specialist	17	21.0
Doctorate	2	2.5
Total	81	100.0

Descriptive Data for Content of the AARS

This section of analysis presents major findings for the research questions related to teacher perspective on use of the MAAECF to measure the performance of students with severe cognitive disabilities. The following analysis of results from the AARS provided information in regard to each research question.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, “To what extent do special education teachers report the MAAECF provides an accurate assessment of performance for students with severe cognitive disabilities?” Survey Question 1 on the AARS asked respondents to rate the accuracy in measuring student performance. A scale ranging from 1 to 4 was used to measure the variable of teacher perspective on accuracy (1 = *not accurate*; 2 = *somewhat accurate*; 3 = *accurate*; 4 = *highly accurate*). The largest number of participants ($n = 27$, 33.5%) indicated their perspective on accuracy was *not accurate*. One respondent did not answer the question; as such, the total number of responses for this question was 80.

Table 4 shows the frequency and percentages for these responses.

Table 4

Rating for Teacher Perspective on Accuracy for Measuring Student Performance

Reported use	Frequency	Percent
Not accurate	27	33.8
Somewhat accurate	22	27.5
Accurate	20	25.0
Highly accurate	11	13.8
Total	80	100.0

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, “To what extent and in what ways did special education teachers report that the results of the MAAECF were used in making curricular and instructional decisions for students identified as having severe cognitive disabilities

in Mississippi schools?” Survey Question 2 on the AARS asked respondents to rate the use of data results in making curricular and instructional decisions.

A scale ranging from 1 to 4 was used to measure the variable of teacher use of data in making curricular and instructional decisions (1 = *not at all*; 2 = *infrequently*; 3 = *frequently*; 4 = *always*). Twenty-five (30.9%) respondents reported *infrequently* using the data results in making curricular and instructional decisions. Of the 81 respondents, 19 (23.5%) selected *not at all*. All 81 of the respondents answered the question. These results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Extent and use of Data Results in Making Curricular and Instructional Decisions

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	19	23.5
Infrequently	25	30.9
Frequently	21	25.9
Always	16	19.8
Total	81	100.0

Survey Question 3 asked, “In what ways do you use the results of the MAAECF? (Mark all that apply).” Question 3 on the AARS asked respondents to convey ways in which they used data results. Four choices were given and participants were asked to select all that applied to assess the variable of teacher use of data results (1 = *curricular decisions*; 2 = *developing IEP goals, services, and least restrictive environments*; 3 = *transition*; 4 = *inclusion*).

Forty-seven (61.8%) respondents reported using the data results in *developing IEP goals, services, and least restrictive environments*. Out of the 81 respondents, 35 (46.1%) selected *curricular decisions*, 24 (31.6%) selected *transition*, and 23 (30.3%) selected *inclusion* (see Table 6). Of the 81 respondents, five did not answer the question. As such, the total number of participants responding to this question was 76.

Table 6

Ways Results of the Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Frameworks are Used

Response	Frequency	Percent
Curricular decisions	35	46.1
IEP goals, services, and least restrictive environments	47	61.8
Transition	24	31.6
Inclusion	23	30.3

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, “What is the reported extent of training programs for special education teachers who administer the MAAECF?” Several survey questions were used to address this research question. Survey Question 4 asked, “Did you attend training related to the MAAECF?” Question 4 on the AARS asked respondents if they attended training. A scale with two choices was given (1 = *Yes*; 2 = *No*). A majority ($n = 71$, 88.0%) of the respondents reported they attended training related to the MAAECF. All of the 81 respondents answered the question.

Survey Question 5 asked, “In which training model did you participate.”

Question 5 on the AARS related back to Question 4. Respondents were asked if they attended training and in which training model they participated. A rating scale with three choices was given (1= Mississippi Department of Education face-to-face model; 2 = teacher-as-trainer model; 3 = web-based training). Of the 71 respondents who said yes, 23 (32.4%) reported having participated in the Mississippi Department of Education face-to-face training model, 22 (31.0%) reported participating in a teacher-as-trainer model, and 26 (36.6%) reported participating in a web-based training model. Of the 81 respondents, 10 did not answer the question. Table 7 shows the frequency and percentages for these responses.

Table 7

Type of Training Model in Which Teachers Participated

Reported model	Frequency	Percent
Mississippi Department of Education face-to-face	23	32.4
Teacher as trainer	22	31.0
Web based	26	36.6
Total	71	100.0

Survey Question 6 was used to address this research question: “How would you rate the quality of the training component of the MAAECF in preparing you to administer the assessment?” Respondents were asked to rate the quality of the training they attended in preparing them to assess their students. A rating scale was used to measure training

quality in regards to the training model in which each teacher participated (1= *poor quality*; 2 = *fair quality*; 3 = *good quality*; 4 = *high quality*). As shown in Table 8, of the 81 respondents, 7 rated the training component *poor quality*, 21 rated the training component *fair quality*, 27 rated the training component *good quality*, and 16 rated the training component *high quality* training. Of the 81 respondents, 10 did not answer the question.

Table 8

Rating the Quality of Training Components in Preparing to Administer the Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Frameworks

Training quality	Frequency	Percent
Poor quality	7	8.9
Fair quality	21	34.2
Good quality	27	35.4
High quality	16	21.5
Total	71	100.0

Table 8 shows the frequency and percentages for these responses. A one-sample chi-square test was conducted to determine whether the observed frequencies were significantly different from the hypothesized frequencies. The findings revealed the observed frequencies were significantly different from the hypothesized ones, $\chi^2(3) = 14.72, p = .002$. When the quality ratings were cross-tabulated against age categories, quality ratings varied significantly across age groups, $\chi^2(3) = 11.41, p = .010$. Two respondents did not answer this question.

As shown in Table 9, respondents below 30 years of age rated the program as having *high quality* (31.4%) more frequently than respondents 30 years or older (3.6%). On the other hand, respondents 30 years or older rated the program as having *fair quality* (53.6%) more than respondents below 30 years of age (23.5%).

Table 9

Cross-Tabulations for Quality Ratings Across Age Groups

Age group	Poor quality		Fair quality		Good quality		High quality	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Younger than 30	5	9.8	12	23.5	18	35.3	16	31.4
30 or older	2	7.1	15	53.6	10	35.7	1	3.6

Note. Percentages are within age categories.

When the quality ratings were cross-tabulated against levels of education, quality ratings varied significantly across levels of education, $\chi^2(6) = 19.30$, $p = .004$. As shown in Table 10, respondents with a bachelor's degree rated the program as having poor quality (17.1%) more frequently than respondents with a master's degree (0%) and respondents who were specialists or had a doctorate (5.3%).

Table 10

Cross-Tabulations for Quality Ratings Across Levels of Education

Education level	Poor quality		Fair quality		Good quality		High quality	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Bachelor's	6	17.1	14	40.0	12	34.3	3	8.6
Master's	0	0.0	12	48.0	7	28.0	6	24.0
Specialist/doctorate	1	5.3	1	5.3	9	47.4	8	42.1

Note. Percentages are within levels of education.

On the other hand, respondents who were specialists or had a doctorate rated the program as having *good quality* (47.4%) more frequently than respondents with a bachelor's degree (34.3%) and respondents with a master's degree (28%). Respondents who had a specialist certificate or a doctorate also rated the program as having *high quality* (45.1%) more frequently than respondents with a bachelor's degree (8.6%) and respondents with a master's degree (24.0%).

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, "How do Mississippi special education teachers report the influence of training (support, feedback, and student interaction) compared to the accuracy, usefulness, and quality of the MAAEC?" Research Question 4 had four corresponding hypotheses that were investigated.

H₁. It was hypothesized that in regard to accuracy in measuring student performance, the training component of the MAAECF would make a greater difference

than support, feedback, and student interaction. A one-sample chi-square test was conducted to determine whether the observed frequencies were significantly different from the hypothesized frequencies. The findings revealed that the observed frequencies were significantly different from the hypothesized ones, $\chi^2(3) = 21.30, p < .001$. Note, however, as shown in Table 11, the component that received the highest frequency was student interaction ($n = 37, 46.8\%$) and not training ($n = 12, 15.2\%$). Therefore, the first hypothesis was not supported. Two respondents skipped this question.

Table 11

Accuracy Ratings for the Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Frameworks Components

Training quality	Frequency	Percent
Training	12	15.2
Support	18	22.8
Feedback	12	15.2
Student interaction	37	46.8
Total	79	100.0

H_2 . It was hypothesized that with regard to usefulness of the results of the MAAECF, the student interaction component of the MAAECF would make the most difference to Mississippi special education teachers. A one-sample chi-square test was conducted to determine whether the observed frequencies were significantly different from the hypothesized frequencies.

The findings revealed the observed frequencies did not differ significantly from the hypothesized ones, $\chi^2(3) = 2.10, p = .551$. As shown in Table 12, the component that received the highest frequency was support ($n = 24, 30.8\%$) and not student interaction ($n = 21, 26.9\%$). Therefore, the second hypothesis was not supported. Three respondents skipped this question.

Table 12

Component of the Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Frameworks With Regard to Usefulness That Made the Most Difference

Training quality	Frequency	Percent
Training	16	20.5
Support	24	30.8
Feedback	17	21.8
Student interaction	21	26.9
Total	78	100.0

H_3 . It was hypothesized that with regard to the quality of administering the MAAECF, the training and student interaction components of the MAAECF would make the most difference to Mississippi special education teachers. A one-sample chi-square test was conducted to determine whether the observed frequencies were significantly different from the hypothesized frequencies. The findings revealed the observed frequencies did not differ significantly from the hypothesized ones, $\chi^2(3) = 3.54, p = .316$. As shown in Table 13, the components that received the highest frequency were feedback ($n = 24, 30.8\%$) and support ($n = 22, 28.2\%$), not training ($n = 19, 24.4\%$) and student

interaction ($n = 13$, 16.7%). Therefore, the third hypothesis was not supported. Three respondents skipped this question.

Table 13

Components That Made the Most Difference in Regard to the Quality of Administering the Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Frameworks

Training quality	Frequency	Percent
Training	19	24.4
Support	22	28.2
Feedback	24	30.8
Student interaction	13	16.7
Total	78	100.0

H_4 . It was hypothesized that, overall, Mississippi special education teachers from various counties on the gulf coast would perceive the use of the MAAECF as beneficial. A one-sample chi-square test was conducted to determine whether the observed frequencies were significantly different from the hypothesized frequencies.

The findings for Hypothesis 4 revealed the observed frequencies did not differ significantly from the hypothesized ones, $\chi^2(3) = 3.70$, $p = .296$. As shown in Table 14, the percentages for the answer choices were quite similar. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis was not supported. Three respondents skipped this question.

Table 14

Overall Attitudes About How Beneficial the Use of the Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Frameworks Can Be

Training quality	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	20	25.00
Somewhat	24	30.00
Beneficial	36	45.10
Total	80	100.00

Summary

This study investigated teacher perspective on the MAAECF and if the assessment provides an accurate assessment of performance for students with severe cognitive disabilities; to what extent they use the results of this assessment in making curricular and instructional decisions; how they report the quality of training programs for those who administer the MAAECF; and how teachers report the influence of training (support, feedback, and student interaction) compared to the accuracy, usefulness, and quality of the MAAECF.

This study revealed that teachers perceive the MAAECF as not providing an accurate assessment of performance for their students with severe cognitive disabilities. It also revealed that Mississippi special education teachers infrequently use the data from the MAAECF in making curricular and instructional decisions; however, they do use the results of the MAAECF in aiding them when it comes to their students' IEP decisions, services, and LRE placements. Through this study, it was also revealed that the quality

of training programs for Mississippi special education teachers who administer the MAAECF preferred using the web-based model of training and believed it to be of good quality training.

One-sample chi-square tests were used to determine what training components made the most difference to Mississippi special education teachers compared to the accuracy, usefulness, and quality of the MAAECF. The test revealed that in regard to accuracy in measuring student performance, the student interaction component of the MAAECF made a slightly higher difference to teachers and not the training component. The same test (one-sample chi-square test) revealed that in regard to usefulness of the results of the MAAECF, the support component of the MAAECF made a slightly higher difference to Mississippi special education teachers. The study also revealed that with regard to the quality of administering the MAAECF, feedback and support made a slightly higher difference to Mississippi special education teachers. The study also revealed that, overall, Mississippi special education teachers from various counties on the gulf coast perceived the use of the MAAECF as being beneficial despite some of the other findings.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results of this study contribute information to the limited body of research addressing the effectiveness of alternate assessment and their impact on the quality of curriculum and instruction for students with severe cognitive disabilities. Laws and policies requiring such assessments have proliferated in the wake of the enactment of the NCLB Act. This chapter includes brief review of the problem, summary of findings, limitations of the study implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion.

Review of Problem

Prior to the mandates of NCLB 2001 and IDEIA 2004, schools, districts, parents, and lawmakers had limited information as to whether or not students with severe cognitive disabilities were receiving an effective and efficient education (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, McGrew, & Vanderwood, 1994). In response to this concern and to fulfill the mandates of NCLB Act of 2001 and IDEIA (2004), states have invested funds and time in development of alternate assessments to measure educational progress for students with severe cognitive disabilities. However, educational research is limited as to the effectiveness and efficiency of the use of alternate assessments in making an impact on learning outcomes for students. Lawmakers failed to realize that simply mandating the process of accountability through assessment will not ensure a positive outcome for students with disabilities (McDonnell et al., 1997).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which Mississippi special education teachers perceive the MAAECF in providing an accurate assessment of academic performance for students with severe cognitive disabilities. In addition, the study probed the ways in which teachers used the results of the MAAECF in making curriculum and instructional decisions for this subgroup of students. Inquiry into teachers' perceived level of the quality of training for the administration of the MAAECF provided insight into the process for preparation for administration of the alternate assessment. Finally, the study was used to determine how teachers perceived the components of training (support, feedback, and student interaction) compared to the accuracy, usefulness, and quality of the MAAECF.

Summary of Findings

The data for this study were obtained through the administration of the Alternate Assessment Rating Scale (AARS), a researcher-developed survey. The survey was disseminated to 123 Mississippi special education teachers to determine the extent of perceived importance and use of data in regards to the MAAECF. Specifically, teachers responded to the accuracy of the assessment, use of the results of the assessment, quality of training programs, and the significance of specific training components. Of the 123 individuals to whom surveys were sent, 81 participated. To obtain quantitative data, a descriptive research design was utilized. Data collected from this study were examined using a statistical test matched to the nature of data collected and the nature of the survey.

Major Findings

An analysis of data collected from the AARS related to teacher perspective on use of the MAAECF to measure the performance of students with severe cognitive disabilities was conducted to inform each of the research questions. The data were analyzed in which the statistical test was set at an alpha level of .05. The following analysis of results from the AARS provided information in response to each research question.

Research Question 1

“To what extent did special education teachers report that the MAAECF provides an accurate assessment of performance for students with severe cognitive disabilities?” Most respondents reported that the MAAECF was not accurate or only somewhat accurate in measuring student performance. Based on this report, it appears that teachers perceived the MAAECF has little to no value in determining the functioning academic levels for students with severe cognitive disabilities. This finding coincides with research by Webster-Graf (2011) whose study revealed that assessments do not test creative thinking or problem solving and schools and students who do not perform well are penalized rather than aided. Historically, students with disabilities have participated in assessments that were determined by the special education teacher and driven by the student’s IEP (Eisenberg, 2006). These assessments were the only accountability measure and the single driving force behind a student’s educational endeavor (Eisenberg, 2006).

Research Question 2

“To what extent and in what ways do special education teachers report that the results of the MAAECF are used in making curricular and instructional decisions for students identified as having severe cognitive disabilities in Mississippi schools?” The results of the AARS indicated that teachers infrequently use the results of the MAAECF in guiding curricular and instructional decisions. This finding does not comport with existing body of literature on this segment of the findings. A central purpose of high-stakes testing is to improve educational and transitional results for students with disabilities (IDEIA, 2004). Not using the data in the way it was intended does not ensure that all students reach their potential (Goals 2000: Education America Act, 1994). Research also stated that teacher perception of the use of alternate assessments for students with severe cognitive disabilities has become integral to making changes in instructional practices (Staugler, 2004). Mississippi special education teachers perceive the MAAECF as having little to no value; therefore, it fails to meet the purpose of providing information that is foundational for teaching and learning activities.

Research Question 3

“What is the reported quality of training programs for special education teachers who administer the MAAECF?” Through this study it was revealed that the quality of training programs for Mississippi special education teachers who administer the MAAECF preferred using the web-based model of training and believed it to be of good quality. This finding supports research by De Stefano et al. (2001) that providing teachers with quality training in administration of alternate assessments is essential to ensure that students demonstrate their best performances and the assessment is

implemented with fidelity to measure their performances. It is noted that when the quality ratings were cross-tabulated against age categories, quality ratings varied significantly across age groups; the study also revealed that teachers 30 years or younger rated the program as having high *quality training* and teachers 30 years or older deemed training as only being of *fair quality*. The conclusion could be made that teachers who have been in education longer might have been through the same training time and time again and not have gotten much from it. The younger teachers have less experience and are learning new ideas and or formats. Another reason could be that new technology might have been used during training and the younger teachers tend to be much more familiar with the training format than the older teachers.

Another interesting finding when education levels were cross tabulated against quality ratings was that the results showed that those at the bachelor's level rated the program as having *poor quality* more than respondents with a master's degree and more so than respondents with a specialist degree or doctorate. On the other hand, respondents who were specialists or had a doctorate rated the program as having *good quality* more than those with a bachelor's and a master's degree. To ensure the data was accurate, due to the contradictory findings when quality ratings were cross-tabulated against age categories, and the finding when education levels were cross tabulated against quality ratings the researcher reassessed the data multiple times. The results indicated no change. This outcome may be due to any number of factors such as being new to the field, changing over from general education, movement within the field, and the length of time in the field which brings with it knowledge, the teachers who were responded to the level of training as being of good quality when cross-tabulated by age might have went

along with the answer because they were in their early stages of teaching and did not want to be singled out if they perceived things not being well in their particular school district.

Research Question 4

“How do special education teachers report the influence of training (i.e., support, feedback, and student interaction) compared to the accuracy, usefulness, and quality of the MAAECF?” The study revealed that in regard to accuracy in measuring student performance, the student interaction component, and not the training component, of the MAAECF made a slightly higher difference to teachers. The findings are similar to those of Kampfer et al. (2001) in which the researchers found that when teachers involved students in the assessment process and engrained the alternate assessment in daily instruction, students’ scores showed improvement. This fact was also supported by Elliott et al. (1996) in which the data revealed that teachers provide valuable information on the impact of assessments on instructional practices and student outcomes.

The study likewise revealed that with regard to the quality of administering the MAAECF, feedback and support made a somewhat higher difference to Mississippi special education teachers. Feedback and support has been shown to positively impact not only the performance of teachers in the classroom but also the achievement of their students (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Joyce & Showers, 2002). This supports the respondents’ view that feedback and support made the most difference.

In regards to usefulness of the results of the MAAECF, the support component of the MAAECF made a slightly higher difference to Mississippi special education teachers.

In a survey by Kampfer et al. (2001), some teachers indicated the amount of assistance and support provided by states was very low and that the teachers themselves often felt secluded. It is the teachers who generally administer and score the assessments in most states and the observation of this study's participants could serve as a vital part of the review and improvement of assessment practice (Wangber, as cited in Kampfer et al., 2001). Teachers reported that education reform had been implemented without any input from them and that the achieved reforms took into account concerns of others and not the teachers (Wangber, as cited in Kampfer et al., 2001).

The study also revealed that, overall, Mississippi special education teachers from various counties on the gulf coast perceived the use of the MAAECF as being beneficial despite not accurately depicting their student's abilities. This outcome may come from teachers understanding of the intent behind the mandates of NCLB (2001) and IDEIA (2004). One possible reason teachers in various counties on the Mississippi gulf coast could perceive the use of the MAAECF as being beneficial could be supported by research conducted by Roach et al. (2007). By having teachers participate in professional developments and equipping teachers with strategies that would promote students' access to the general education curriculum and instruction, teachers tend to see the benefits behind the alternate assessments (Roach et al., 2007). Another reason for teachers seeing the alternate assessment as being beneficial might be explained by a study by Kleinert et al. (1999) that revealed teachers expressed positive attitudes of the alternate assessment with regard to educational benefit for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Limitations

The following limitations were identified as possible restrictions in the research method for this study:

1. The study relied on self-reported information through a survey; no assurance is given that the participants gave adequate time and thought when completing the questionnaire.
2. The survey was designed with forced responses, which did not provide an opportunity for respondents to elaborate or construct their own responses to increase accuracy of reporting.
3. This study was limited to special education teachers in various counties of the Mississippi gulf coast; therefore, the results should be generalized to other settings only with appropriate caution. The response rate to the study was good but is still a relatively small sample.

Implications for Policy and Practice

In 1975, with the passage of Public Law 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Yell et al., 1998), the federal government enacted a law that allowed students with disabilities a free, appropriate, public, education. From then on, the federal government has passed numerous educational laws that pertain to students with disabilities. These laws increased the rights to an equal and meaningful education, not unlike their nondisabled peers. However, with each passing presidency, the educational laws seem to become even more demanding and confusing.

At the federal level, before educational law is put in place, which will no doubt have an impact on a multitude of the school-aged population, it would behoove the

federal government to complete a pilot program to prove or disprove whether the idea will work. It would also be beneficial to the state and local education agencies for the federal government to give concrete guidelines on how they want the new program to be developed, implemented, and run. This would cause less stress on the states and waste less time in the local school districts trying to figure out if they are heading in the right direction and helping instead of hindering there students. Neither the NCLB Act of 2001 nor IDEIA (2004) have concrete guidelines, making it impossible to reach goals on the educational system. It would be a good idea to look to teachers in the trenches to help develop a more attainable systematic program that can be built upon yearly, not just during a presidential term.

With each passing law or amendment to such law, state and local education agencies are continuously reviewing and revising existing policies and measures to accommodate the mandates from the federal government. It is vital that these agencies take an active approach to guarantee that assessments are being improved upon. State and local education agencies should make modifications to existing policy based on data collected from the field (i.e., school districts, teachers, parents, and school personnel), possibly through statewide surveys. Once the surveys are completed, the recommendations made by general and special education administrators and teachers for improving existing policies and assessment processes should be taken into account when making changes to policies and procedures. A committee (composed of state and local education agencies, special education directors, and both special and general education teachers) should be formed to review the current policies and make changes which reflect the recommendations of all involved.

Students with or without disabilities deserve a free, appropriate education that leads to a chance of living a successful life. This study indicates that even though Mississippi special education teachers may not see the assessment itself as providing an accurate assessment of performance for students with severe cognitive disabilities, they do perceive the practice of assessing students as beneficial. It is imperative that teachers have a thorough understanding of the MAAECF process and how to provide continuous instructional standards. To ensure teachers understand the concept behind alternate assessments, the Mississippi Department of Education should enact more professional development for special education teachers so that they may understand the intent of the MAAECF along with obtaining training in best practices for use of its data. The training must include instruction on how to administer the MAAECF along with information on the importance of using assessment results to help guide instruction and help students with severe cognitive disabilities access the general education programs.

In order to abide by the NCLB Act of 2001 and IDEIA (2004), the Mississippi Department of Education formed a team composed of state directors, university professors, researchers, and superintendents (MDE, 2007) who were directly involved in the development and planning of the content and procedures for the MAAECF. Some Mississippi special education teachers were given an opportunity to respond to surveys or provide suggestions. It is recommended that teachers of students with severe cognitive disabilities be more involved in the future development and planning of all programs that impact the educational endeavors of their students; this should include but not be limited to in-service programs for statewide training, assessments, and changes to special education programs.

Not only is it important for teachers to understand the why behind assessing students with severe cognitive disabilities, it is also important for teachers to know that through the assessment process, they have a support system in place. In a study by Kampfer et al. (2001), teachers indicated the amount of assistance and support provided by states was very low. Data collected by the AARS indicated Mississippi special education teachers reported that the support component, not the training component, of the MAAECF made the most difference to them. With that being said, it is imperative that the LEA find additional methods separate of professional developments or assessment training to support their special education teachers through the assessment process. Ideas such as time during school hours to connect with other special education teachers who administer the MAAECF, hiring substitute teachers to cover classes while teachers are administering the assessments, or working lunches with their administrators (principals, special education directors) to discuss obstacles or express concerns would be ways to ensure these teachers feel supported.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations for future research can be made:

1. Future research into the education perspectives of directors and assistant directors of special education regarding the MAAECF should be conducted. Not unlike teachers, they too have a stake in the outcomes of the assessments and how the data are used in instructional curriculum decisions.
2. Future research into parents' perceptions of the alternate assessment should be conducted. IDEIA (1997) set forth mandates that ultimately gave parents a voice into

their child's educational endeavors. Now, with alternate assessments, they should have the opportunity to express whether the assessments are helping or hurting their children's chance for a better life.

3. Future research into tracking a group of children with severe cognitive disabilities from kindergarten through 2 years past 12th grade should be conducted. The mandate behind alternate assessments for students with disabilities is to increase the number of children participating in the general education program that then translates into higher student expectations and outcomes (Christie et al., 2001).

Discussion and Conclusions

Although a limited body of research is available to support the influence of state-supported alternate assessments for making positive changes in instructional practices (Staugler, 2004), lawmakers have failed to realize that simply mandating the process of accountability through assessment will not ensure a positive outcome for students with disabilities (McDonnell et al., 1997). Disconnect between what the law mandates and what teachers believe to be achievable is evident. Teachers are the untapped resources in regard to developing and implementing an assessment that would be not only user friendly to teachers but demonstrate student abilities. Much can be learned by observing, talking too and listening to, teachers who work with students with severe cognitive disabilities. Those who are teaching now are the experts in the field, but those with little or no experience in the field of special education are the ones allowed to make the changes. Research by Kamper et al. (2001) has shown that teachers who work with children with disabilities know their students well, what they are capable of doing, and how to get their students to show such measures.

By placing teachers at the development level of the assessment, will possibly reduce the number of changes having to be made yearly, increase the content level of their students due to having an assessment that is formulated and devised with their strengths in mind, and also ensure that the assessment data will help increase their students' opportunities and length of time in the general education setting with their nondisabled peers.

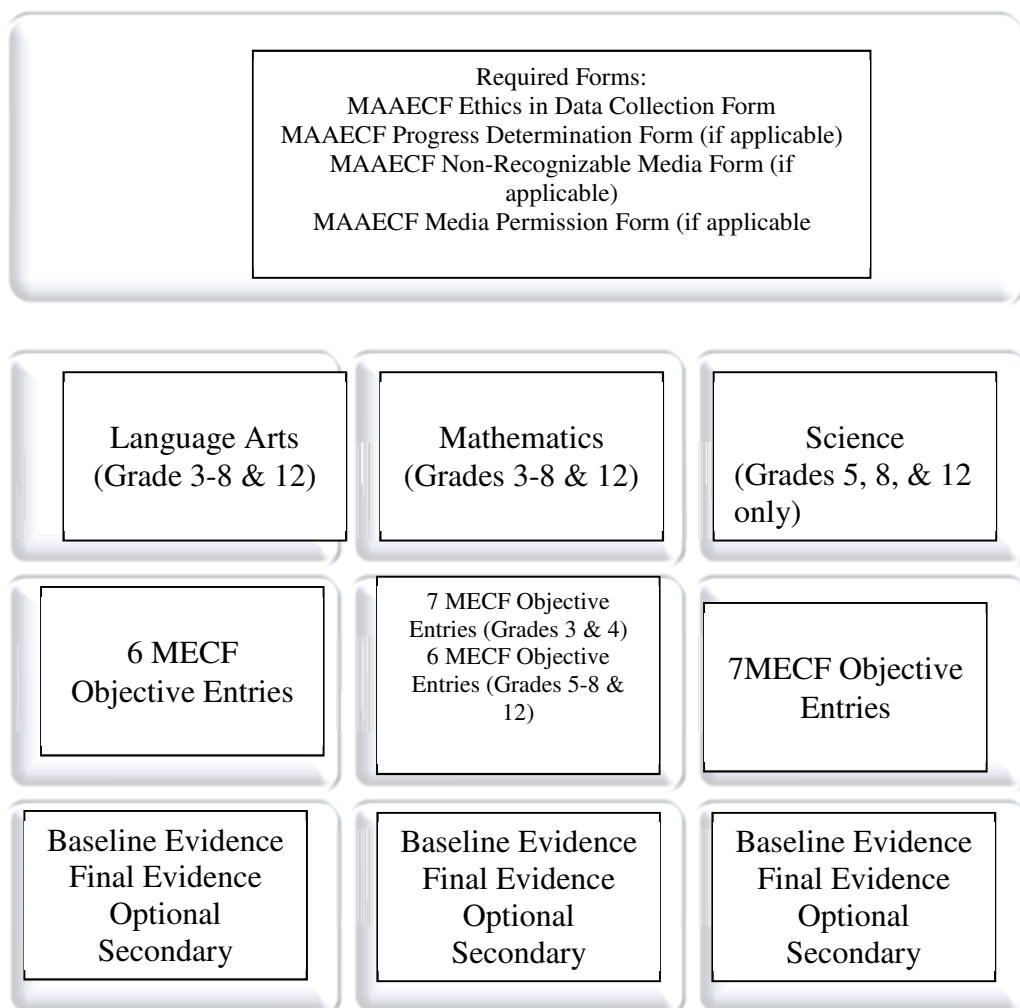
These findings call into question the effectiveness for the practice of lawmakers legislating education reform. Lawmakers have failed to realize the complexity of education systems. Simply mandating the process of accountability through assessment will not ensure a positive outcome for students with disabilities (McDonnell et al., 1997). No doubt, as the nation moves forward with a national commitment to improve American education systems, assessments will continue to be a topic of controversy at all levels of education. Until the next idea comes along that can incorporate measures of accountability, student learning, and alignment of curriculum to state standards, assessments will continue to be used to provide the information that stakeholders are demanding. As government continues to legislate that the quality of education be measured by high-stakes accountability testing, researchers will need to employ diligence to determine the effectiveness of the legislative mandates. Moreover, as education budgets continue to be cut, an in-depth look into the funding of accountability testing such as the alternate assessment for students with severe cognitive disabilities must be conducted to determine whether the results of the reform warrant the level of funding necessary to support the reform.

Summary

Special education was developed to include students with disabilities in the educational system through a free, appropriate, public education. With each passing presidency, laws have been mandated to ensure that the tradition of inclusion continues; however, it does not seem that all laws have been beneficial to students with disabilities. Special education teachers spend a majority of their day working with, preparing for and learning all they can about their students and the child's abilities and disabilities. Federal, state, and local educational agencies would benefit by talking to, surveying, observing and ultimately consulting teachers in the field before they decide to mandate a program only to find that the intended outcome and level of belief in the mandate is almost nonexistent. If teachers have the knowledge and experience needed to help their students become successful, it would only make sense that they can be of benefit to those who enact policies and laws.

APPENDIX A

CONTENT AND GRADE – LEVEL STANDARDS FOR MAAECF



Note. From *Teacher Resource Guide for the Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Frameworks (MAAECF)*, by Mississippi Department of Education, 2011b. Retrieved from <http://home.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/student-assessment/maaecf-20trg-20--20reduced-20pdf.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

APPENDIX B

SUPERINTENDENTS' PERMISSION AND CONSENT FORM

120 Birchwood Rd.
 Danville, VA 24540
 February 19, 2013

Superintendent
 _____ County School District
 Street
 City, State Zip Code

Dear Superintendent:

I am Lynn Bezue-Tull, a doctoral candidate at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am conducting research for doctoral dissertation on teacher perception of the Mississippi Alternate Assessment Extended Curriculum Framework. I would like your written permission to survey all the special education teachers of students with severe cognitive disabilities who have administered the MAAECF in your district. This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

With your permission, this questionnaire will be distributed to **(place school names here)**. The questionnaire will be distributed by e-mail (SurveyMonkey.com) with written instructions and is not expected to take longer than 20 minutes to complete. A copy of the questionnaire and instructions will be sent to you upon approval from the Institutional Review Board for our records. Participation in the project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. All personal information is strictly confidential, anonymity of districts, schools, and participants will be honored. The aggregated findings of the study will be shared with the superintendent upon request, but results should not be used for personnel evaluations.

If you consent to have the listed school's special education teachers participate in this research, please sign and date the enclosed consent form and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, you can contact me at greer932000@yahoo.com or 228-547-3028.

Sincerely,
 Lynn Bezue-Tull, Ed.S
 Doctoral Candidate
 The University of Southern Mississippi

APPENDIX C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN TEACHER REPORT ON THE MAAECF SURVEY

As superintendent of _____County School District, I give Lynn Bezue-Tull permission to conduct educational research at the following schools:_____. This research will be conducted on teacher perceptions of the MAAECF upon approval from the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board. Permission is granted to survey the special education teachers of students with severe cognitive disabilities, who have administered the MAAECF during the 2011-2012 school year. I understand participation in this research is voluntary. All responses will be kept confidential. No individuals, schools or districts will be identified in any of the reports.

Superintendent's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
 Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
 Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 13021901

**PROJECT TITLE: An Analysis of Teacher Perspective on the Mississippi
 Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Framework**

PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation

RESEARCHER(S): Greerlynn M. Bezue-Tull

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology

DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership and School Counseling

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 04/24/2013 to 04/23/2014

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX E

COVER LETTER ACCOMPANYING SURVEY

Greerlynn M. Bezue-Tull
120 Birchwood Road
Danville, Virginia 24540
Email: greer932000@gmail.com

Dear Mississippi Special Educator:

You have been selected to participate in a doctoral research study regarding the Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Framework and its accurate depiction of student performance, how the data is used in guiding curricular and instructional decisions, and the extent to which training, support, feedback and student interaction might have had on the accuracy, usefulness and quality of the MAAECF. As you are aware legislative trends pertaining to assessment under No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, has increased the educational accountability for students with severe cognitive disabilities by assessing them through alternate means. This has meant immense changes and challenges for everyone involved, with little or no guidance as how to reach the goals set in place.

I realize that your time is precious. The survey, Alternate Assessment Rating Scale (AARS), will take less twenty minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and your responses are confidential along with the assurance that your school will not be identified, either. Data will be password protected, be reported in aggregate form only, with no identification of individual responses. Your responses are very important to this research and your timely participation is valued. Although your participation would be greatly appreciated, there is no penalty for declining to participate in this study. Your responses on the AARS survey will assist in giving Mississippi administrators, state educational agencies, and stake holders, a teacher's insight into MAAECF, as we strive to meet the high accountability standards required by federal policies. If you are willing to participate in this study, which has been approved by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board, please click on the link below. The submission of your completed survey implies your informed consent to participate. Thank you in advance for your participation in this study.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KJWG5P9>

The research has been approved by the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board, if you have any questions or would like to further information on this study, you may contact me at 228-547-3028. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive # 5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, 601-266-6820.

Sincerely,

Greerlynn M. Bezue-Tull
Doctoral Candidate, University of Southern Mississippi

APPENDIX F

The ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT RATING SCALE

1. Rate the accuracy of the MAAECF in measuring the performance of students with severe cognitive disabilities

- ☐ Not Accurate
- ☐ Somewhat Accurate
- ☐ Accurate
- ☐ Highly Accurate

2. To what extent do you use the results of the MAAECF in making curricular and instructional decisions?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Infrequently
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Always

3. In what ways do you use the results of the MAAECF? (mark all that apply)

- ☐ Curricular Decisions
- ☐ Developing IEP goals, services and LRE
- ☐ Transition
- ☐ Inclusion

4. Did you attend training related to MAAECF?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5. In which training model did you participate?

- ☐ MSDE Face to Face Seminar
- ☐ Teacher as Trainer Model
- ☐ Web Based Training

6. How would rate the quality of the training component of the MAAECF in preparing you to administer the assessment?

- ☐ Poor Quality
- ☐ Fair Quality
- ☐ Good Quality
- ☐ High Quality

7. With regard to accuracy in measuring student performance, which of the following components of the MAAECF made the most difference?

- ☐ Training
- ☐ Support
- ☐ Feedback
- ☐ Student Interaction

8. With regard to usefulness of the results of the MAAECF, which of the following components of the MAAECF made the most difference?

- ☐ Training
- ☐ Support
- ☐ Feedback
- ☐ Student Interaction

9. With the regard to the quality of administering the MAAECF, which of the following components of the MAAECF made the most difference?

- ☐ Training
- ☐ Support
- ☐ Feedback
- ☐ Student Interaction

10. Overall, how beneficial do you perceive the use of the MAAECF to be ?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Beneficial
- ☐ Highly Beneficial

***11. Which category below includes your age?**

- ☐ 17 or younger
- ☐ 18-20
- ☐ 21-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60 or older

***12. How long have you been teaching in the Special Education Field?**

- ☐ 0-5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11-15
- ☐ 20 -25
- ☐ 25-30 or more

13. Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

***14. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- ☐ Bachelor
- ☐ Masters
- ☐ Specialist
- ☐ Doctorate

***15. Are you considered Highly Qualified in your field according to No Child Left Behind?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

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